7:Lewis S-5 (ca. 1940-45) 1948 MDI Syria MDI

necessity for health's sake alone, but should be part of a general *mise en valeur* of the region's resources. This is the type of approach which is most likely to succeed, because it is linked with the material interests of the landowners. They will lend their support and active participation if given technical advice, supervision, and material and financial help to defray part of the capital outlay.

Swamps, Floods, and Soil Erosion

Malaria-control measures were taken with a fair degree of success in 20 villages in 1944–1945. Various factors, however, combine to prevent a permanent reduction of the incidence of the disease. Among these are the necessity for constant supervision, the need for repeated cleanings of canals and ditches, and the improvidence of the inhabitants. Most important is the fact that floods will certainly undo much of the work.

Winter floods are frequently heavy enough to destroy or damage seriously the repair and maintenance works, which are of value to agriculture and malaria control alike. Malaria causes debility and apathy among the villagers, and the certainty that floods will recur reinforces this apathy, making everyone disinclined to expend energy and money in work which must be done again in a few years. The canals and watercourses at Moufaggar, for example, have been badly damaged in the past; in fact, damage by floods was the main reason for the modification of the old foggara system. The southern foggara and watercourse are now protected against torrents by a concrete wall at the upper end, but as the system lies in one of the main valleys coming from Jebel Bil'as, it is doubtful whether the device will be a great success. Although the broad, nearly flat valley north of Selemiya has benefited from its wide catchment area—it is built up of alluvium, as much as 10 feet deep—it is partly derelict because floods have created extensive swamps and ruined old foggaras. In 1945–1946 useful drainage work was undertaken here.

The floods are due in part to the occasional sudden and torrential rainstorms, characteristic of this as of other semiarid regions. Wadis are sometimes filled for a few hours with violent, detritus-laden torrents and are then left dry again. The steep slopes and absorptive limestones are contributing factors. English merchants, traveling in 1691, noted[11] that after a heavy rainstorm

> those hollow Gutts which we passed over without the least appearance of Moisture, were, by the Cataracts which descended from the Mountains, become Rivers; . . . the next Morn-

[11] "An Extract of the Journals" (*op. cit.*), p. 144 [Miscellanea Curiosa, pp. 139–140].

7: Lewis S-5 (ca. 1940-45) 1948 MD1 Syria MD1

ing all this great quantity of Water was past away, so that in about two Hour's Riding we could hardly perceive that there had been any Rain at all. 731

That floods are an old phenomenon in Selemiya is suggested by two traditional theories, repeated by the inhabitants today, regarding the derivation of the place name. The first theory makes the essential form Sal-Miah, "a flood of water." The other was recorded by Yaqut in 1225:

> Ahmad ibn Yahyâ ibn Jâbir relates that there was a city in Syria, near Salamiyyah, called Al Mûtafikah [The Overturned], which was overwhelmed with all its inhabitants—all except one hundred souls. These left that place, and came and built one hundred houses, and they called the hamlet where they had made their houses Salâm Miyah (Peace for the Hundred), of which the people made Salamiyyah.[22]

As told today, the story is that the "overwhelming" agent was a flood.

The floods are greatly aggravated by soil erosion. Where the trees have been cut, the bushes torn up for fuel, and the grass overgrazed, and especially where slopes have been plowed, there the soil is eroded, and many slopes are now practically bare of soil and vegetation. In summer, soil is shifted by strong winds; in winter, rain washes it into gullies or wadis with steep, crumbling sides. These are tributary to the main streams which do so much damage when they reach the plain. The runoff from bare slopes is faster and more fully loaded than that from vegetated slopes. 731 134

Past and Present Vegetation Destruction

There is no doubt that the trees of Jebel Bil'as are a remnant of a denser and more extensive growth, though there are no very good grounds for the common assumption that all the Palmyrene ranges were forested in Roman days. The Tablet of Palmyra's fiscal laws of A.D. 137[23] gives reason to suppose that the locality may have furnished considerable quantities of wood and pistachio nuts, and in the same period Jebel Bil'as and neighboring ranges were used as grazing lands for sheep and horses.[24] The location of elaborate Romano-Byzantine foggara systems, as at Moufaqqar, directly in the paths of the floods might seem to indicate that, when the foggaras were constructed, floods were not as serious as they are now. 175 137 [172]

Old stumps and roots are found within and beyond the present wooded

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[22] Le Strange, *op. cit.*, p. 510.

[23] See J.-B. Chabot: Choix d'inscriptions de Palmyre, Paris, 1922, pp. 23-38.

[24] A. Poidebard: La trace de Rome dans le désert de Syrie.—Le limes de Trajan à la conquête arabe.—Recherches aériennes (1925-1932) (Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, Vol. 18), Paris, 1934; M. D. Schlumberger: Une campagne de fouilles au Djebel-el-Chaar en 1934, *Comptes Rendus de l'Acad. des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1935, pp. 250-256. 113

11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria MD1

the towns is scarcely above subsistence-level. In most parts of the country the huts of the peasants, made of wattle or mud-brick or in parts of stone, contain nothing but the barest necessities; and the greater part of the population live on a diet of bread, olive-oil, milk and perhaps fruit and vegetables in season. Famine is rare, and has not occurred on a large scale since the First World War; but malnutrition is very widespread. On account of this and of the absence of sanitation and the scarcity of doctors in the country districts, the standard of health is also low. Malaria, typhoid, trachoma and other diseases are endemic. The standard of living is highest in Beirut and the Christian parts of Lebanon, which have profited greatly from the savings and experience of the emigrants to the New World.

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The changes in the economic system are beginning to cause far-reaching changes in the whole social structure. In the larger towns the externals of life are almost wholly modernized. Clothes and foodstuffs, the construction and furnishing of houses and methods of transport all approximate to those in use in Europe. The old externals it is true still linger on; the camel and the motor-car jostle one another in the streets of Damascus. But it is generally recognized, and on the whole without regret, that it is only a matter of time until the old completely disappears. In the small towns and villages of the Christian portions of Lebanon, too, the process of Westernization in externals has gone far. In the smaller towns and countryside of the interior, the change is slower in coming; but motor-cars and roads have prepared the way for it.

The fundamental social forms, however, are slower in changing. The dominant social class is still that of the landowners, who continue to possess a semi-feudal status. No other social class is strong or self-conscious enough to stand against them. The cultivators have little effective power of moving from one estate or region to another; although intelligent, they are too unenlightened to have much effective sense of grievance or capacity for political or economic combination. Only in parts of Lebanon does there exist a considerable number of free and comparatively enlightened smallholders. As yet there is neither an industrial middle